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SHORT
H I N T S
UPON
L E V E L L I N G.

EXTRACTED FROM

Dr. VINCENT's DISCOURSE,
ADDRESSED TO THE PEOPLE OF GREAT BRITAIN.

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THE V E I E V E

ADDRESSED TO THE
JULY 1941



A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

IT will probably occur to the Reader, upon perusal of the following pages, that when poverty is stated as an evil of necessity, the remedy of the evil ought to be found, not in the will of man, but in the ordinance of law. The Author is aware of the objection, and begs leave to obviate it, by remarking, that the moral part of the argument was his sole concern ; it was for this reason that he has considered even the poor laws not as a legal injunction, but as an institution derived from the disposition of the people.

There is no political cure for poverty but the encouragement of industry. This is a point thoroughly understood by the Legislature, and provided for by the law. In this view, every drawback and bounty, every protecting duty, every regulation of the corn trade, and every assistance given to the fisheries, ought to be regarded as *political charity*, tending to promote industry, and to find employment for the people. The principles on which this system is founded, may be traced in the following pages ; the system itself is left to be developed by those, whose business is political research.

A plain argument may produce its effect by due attention to arrangement and perspicuity ; and if, among the numerous publications of the present day, directed to the same object, these Hints shall, in any degree, contribute to promote peace, subordination, brotherly love, and Christian charity, no apology is requisite for obtruding on the Public the sentiments of an individual.

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SHORT
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ALL History and all experience prove, that wherever Society exists there must exist a class of poor. Those who deny the necessary existence of such a class, who assert that the gifts of Nature and the bounties of Providence are common to all, intend no good to the poor themselves, but mean to excite discontent and tumult, and use the poor as an instrument in an attack meditated upon the rich. Now whatever produces convulsion in a State, tends not to diminish, but to increase the number of the poor.

But if the poor consider poverty as an evil, it will be both a moral and a social duty to teach the poor themselves, that it is an evil they suffer—not from the nature of the Government they live under—not from any system of oppression planned by their superiors—not from want of good laws or regulations, but from the constitution of society; and that however it is the object and the interest of every good government to alleviate poverty, all attempts to eradicate it, tend finally to the dissolution of society, and not to the removal of the evil.

And if the evil is without remedy, some philosophers, perhaps, may be rash enough to assert that society ought to be dissolved. But to this we cannot assent, because a state of nature, for one evil it removes, induces a thousand more noxious, and more destructive; it does not better the condition of the poor, but destroys all the other classes in the community; it does not relieve the poor from oppression, but deprives them of protection and support.

There is in fact no such thing as a state of nature, nor ever was. The passions of man, his wants, desires, hopes, and fears, all reclaim against it; savage life is only one step indeed removed from it, and that state which approaches towards it, is miserable exactly in proportion to its approach. The very beggar in society, if he has no property, has a life to lose, and *that* is protected; but if society is dissolved, there is no law but force. A state of nature is a state of war*.

It is in vain to argue this, because it is what no rational man will disallow; but if it is once granted that society is necessary for man, we must take it with all the evils that attend it; and if those evils are of necessity, they ought to occasion no more repining at the course of the moral and political world, than storms and tempests, disease and pestilence, cause in the ordinary course of nature.

It is not my intention to pronounce, that poverty is not an evil; for though it is a good when compared with the miseries of savage life, it is an evil at least by comparison, when put in competition with the blessings those enjoy who are possessed of rank, dignity, and fortune.

I. Granting, however, that it is an evil, let us next consider the means of alleviating it, and this has employed the minds of the wisest and best men in all ages. Philosophy and Religion exhort us to restrain our wants within the limits of our circumstances; and in truth, wherever this can be effected, it produces a real happiness which even the rich seldom enjoy. But as the great body of mankind is not actuated by

* The nations which approach nearest to a state of nature, are the American Indians and New Zealanders, and of both it may be said, their hand is against every man, and every man's hand against them. They not only slay their enemies, but eat them; and history informs us this always was the case in similar circumstances.

motives

motives of this sort, and few in any rank are capable of refinement so exalted, we must come to the practice of mankind instead of sentiment, and examine the plans which have been proposed to remedy the evil.

1. One of the most specious schemes produced for this purpose, is an equal division of land; and there is nothing that at first sight appears so pleasing to the people, so just, and rational. It is, however, in fact delusive to the highest degree; for at the same time it excites envy, malevolence, and all the worst passions of the human breast, it is a robbery on the rich, and no real relief to the poor.

This experiment has been tried in more instances than one, but has constantly failed in the execution, or event; nor can it ever answer, till you can make every portion of land equal in value, as well as extent, and every possessor equal in talents, industry, and virtue.

If we can suppose a whole people entering upon a new-discovered country without inhabitants, it is the only instance we can find, in which such an allotment could take place, consistently with justice; and this instance has not yet occurred in the history of mankind.

2. A second instance, which has occurred too frequently, is, where a conquering nation has divided the lands of the conquered; the injustice here is to the conquered only; among the conquerors, all is equal, fair, and just. In this situation were the Israelites, when they divided the land of Canaan. But if we suppose that after this division was once made, it continued to prevent, or served to eradicate poverty, we have read our Bible very imperfectly; for Moses declares in express words, that the poor should never cease out of the land.

3. A third instance is, where, in a country long established, and where all the inequalities of property have already taken place, an attempt has been made to appoint a new division, to strip the rich, and give an equal portion to every individual of the community.

This attempt has been made in several countries, but except in one instance was never carried into execution; in that instance indeed the event corresponded to the design of the legislator who effected it; but the design itself was faulty,

and the plan of government it produced could not serve as a model for any other nation upon earth. Figure to yourselves a nation of warriors without agriculture, arts, commerce, or manufacture, and you will see that such a people could not exist without slaves to till the soil. Figure to yourselves a military class of citizens ruling over a populace of slaves *; and those slaves † seven times the number of their masters, and you may then form some conception of that state which history holds up to us as a pattern of equality, as the pride of Greece, and the admiration of mankind.

In this case the equality of the free citizens generated of necessity a class of slaves; and if the experiment were tried at this day in any nation of Europe, though slavery might not be the consequence, there is no rashness in affirming that something worse would follow than poverty with all its evils.

The poor perhaps of our own country, when they look up to the immoderate wealth of some individuals, and see the manner in which that wealth is too frequently misused, naturally conceive that a more equal distribution of property would be more consistent with justice, and the certain means of relieving their own wants; but if the experiment were tried, either by a new division of land, or money, the result would not be relief, but disappointment.

For if we were to estimate the inhabitants of England at ten ‡ millions, and divide the land equally among them, it amounts by a very easy computation to less than four acres a

* The Helots of Lacedæmon were not, properly speaking, the slaves of individuals, but of the public, though doubtless many of them were domesticated. But the just idea of Helotism is, a nation of slaves under a nation of warriors. The Penestæ of Thessaly were in the same condition.

† I take this estimate from the number of Helots who attended the Lacedæmonian army at the battle of Platæa. There is much reason to believe that the disproportion was far greater.

‡ I rate the number of inhabitants at ten millions, and the number of acres at between thirty and forty millions.

The number of inhabitants will be thought too large, but the argument will be equally valid whether you give every man four acres or six. I do not think, however, that I rate the inhabitants too high: for when we recollect that our political arithmeticians calculated the specie of the nation at about ten or twelve millions, which upon the gold coinage proved to be between thirty and forty, we have some reason to doubt their exactness in regard to population.

Sir William Petty estimates twenty-eight or twenty-nine millions of acres.

Dr. Davenant reckons five millions and a half for the number of inhabitants, and gives seven acres and a half a man.

Major Grant allows four acres a man.

See Chambers's Dict. art. Acre, and Poli. Arith.

man ;

man; suppose then every individual possessed of such an estate, how is he to cultivate it? If he has been an artisan, he is ignorant of the means: if he has been an husbandman before, he knows it will not support the oxen for his plough: he cannot hire assistants, for all are masters; he cannot hire or borrow cattle, for all are as unable to maintain them as himself. He must dig and sow and reap with his own hands; he must submit to the primeval curse of Adam; all the remedies of this curse, which the experience of six thousand years has discovered, must be thrown away, and he must sit down just where Adam began. In the mean time if all are husbandmen, where is the manufacturer to clothe him? where is the mariner to export his produce, or bring him the produce of other countries?

But let us try this question again, by dividing all the money and moveable property of the nation; and suppose the share of each individual to amount to twenty pounds or forty, or any indefinite sum, how are the poor to be bettered by this? Why they would live till the sum was expended without labour. That is happiness in truth; but when it *was* expended, they must return to labour again, and where are they to find an employer? All would be masters without servants, or servants without masters, and the system would be complete if they could have a nation of Kings, and an army of Generals. But let us suppose that the industrious man has improved his talents, while the profligate has squandered his share; what is the consequence? but that the frugal and provident must submit to a new division, and the idle and abandoned plunder him over again.

We may illustrate this by a familiar instance, which the poor will feel as forcibly as the rich; for if it should ever become illegal for one man to be richer than another, the savings of the poor are as liable to plunder, as the hoards of the rich. If a labourer has saved twenty shillings at the end of the year, four vagabonds shall tell him, that he has no right to be richer than themselves; that they have nothing, and therefore he must surrender four parts of his gain to them, and console himself with the fifth.

I wish to speak a language which the meanest individual may understand; I wish to teach the poor that every plan of this sort is delusive, that even their own interest is concerned in the well-being of their superiors, and that whatever tends to dissolve the tie, instead of relieving their wants, would add tenfold to their misery.

One consideration has been reserved purposely for this place, and that is the *injustice* of stripping the rich, to add to the poor.

In the first place, then, there are more honourable ways open for acquiring wealth in our own country, than usually occur in others; and if wealth has been acquired by patient industry, by superior talents or abilities, by hazards of life or health in a foreign country, by public services at home, what viler species of robbery can be conceived than to strip the possessor of the fruit of his labours, and reduce him to his original condition?

Injustice of this kind must put a stop to all industry in the lower orders; to every exertion of talents, knowledge, or abilities in the higher. We sow in hope that we may reap, we seek knowledge in hope that it may profit us: take away that hope, and you banish all knowledge out of the world, and reduce the earth to be a wilderness again.

It may be said, however, that wealth is sometimes obtained by unjust, fraudulent, or dishonourable means, and *this* undoubtedly is true. But against fraud and injustice the law provides a remedy in every well-regulated community; and against dishonourable means, we must set the opinion of mankind. Laws cannot be framed against every improper acquisition of wealth, without encroaching at the same time on the security of legal property, and the security of property is the first incitement to exertion, the first band and object of society.

4. But there is another plan for reducing immoderate riches, and lessening the inequality of mankind, which is, by abolishing the right of primogeniture, and dividing property into equal shares upon the decease of the possessor. In this, the poor have little concern, as no share of the division would devolve on them, and unless we can suppose them actuated from mere envy with the desire of humiliating those above them, we can find no immediate interest they have in contributing to promote such a design.

But in the design itself, if there is no robbery, there is still the greatest injustice, and the most evident impolicy. The laws call upon us all to be industrious; the laws protect that property which is the effect of our industry; but if fresh laws shall afterwards deprive us of the disposal of our property, law is no longer consistent with itself, but contradictory; for on the one hand it cherishes industry,

industry, and on the other represses it. The first grand spur to industry is the security of property; the second is liberty of using it at the will of the possessor: if either of these be checked, industry is nipped in the bud; and in our own country, if industry were once discouraged, the poor, instead of finding bread, would be annihilated.

It is a political question, How far a rich nobility, a wealthy gentry, a substantial yeomanry, contribute to the support of liberty, and the well being of the community? Dismissing this therefore as a consideration foreign to our purpose, let us consider the wealth of individuals as the produce of industry, or the means of promoting it. I say then, that extensive commerce implies extensive capitals; that capitals are employed in the commerce of our own country equal to the property of Princes; that if the merchant was compelled to divide his substance by any law whatever, exclusive of the check it would be on his own industry, it would destroy the possibility of conducting any extensive commerce; and that if the merchant is driven from his profession, the manufacturer must fail, the loom must stand still, and the ploughshare rust in the furrow.

To remove delusions of this kind from the minds of the people, is not merely a moral, but a civil and a social duty; for whatever tends to dissolve the bands, or disturb the order of society, is the source of envy, malevolence, jealousy, hatred, and all the foulest passions of the human heart. Whatever tends to hold men together by ties of common interest, produces mutual affection, good-will, and charity, makes us better men, better citizens, and Christians; and serves to promote the object of all society,—that is, PEACE.

II. All remedies of this kind therefore which have been proposed are nugatory and delusive; but let us now consider those which Society itself holds forth which are usually esteemed salutary and practicable, which are in some sense efficacious, because, though they do not eradicate the evil, they assuage the pain, and moderate the effects.

The poor perhaps would think it mockery, after what has been said, if they were told that the most certain relief was to be found in patience and content; and yet the poet and the moralist paint content in the cottage, and anxiety as the constant attendant on the palace and the throne.

throne. But the truth is, that content belongs no more to the one than the other ; men are equally dissatisfied in high stations as in low, and those only in both have the greatest chance for happiness, who are most virtuous and best employed.

But if content is not to be found, the next object is industry, and industry in some degree implies discontent ; for all that labour earnestly, endeavour to better their present situation. If we trace up the consequences of this in higher life, it relieves the great from that listlessness arising from facility of enjoyment, which riches present to them too profusely ; and if we examine it among the lower orders, it is the source of order, decency, and sobriety ; it begets habits, which, if they are not virtuous, are allied to virtue, which render men useful to each other, and profitable to society.

But if industry is proposed to man by nature as an advantage and a blessing—if every form of society tends to forward and promote it, let us reflect with pleasure that our own Constitution goes beyond all others in the means it has taken to perfect this design.

For whatever security other Governments may hold out, if there is a country in the world where property is more secure than in another, it is our own ; but there is likewise an additional spur, which, though it acts secretly and imperceptibly, is, perhaps, the first cause of that vigour and energy which has raised our commerce above that of all the nations which surround us. The road * to honour, rank, and dignity, is open to all, there is no *legal* obstruction to prevent the artisan from obtaining the most honourable station in his country, for, though the prize can fall to few, the hopes extend to all ; and hence arises an emulation through all the intermediate steps to rank, which invigorates and animates the whole community.

Perhaps we may be told this is the fair side of the picture, for it is impossible that all should succeed, and therefore that when we present these hopes to their mind, we deceive them in the outset, and make them more unhappy in the event. But to this we may answer, that there is no delusion possible,

* The principal popular governments in Europe are Venice, Holland, and Switzerland.

In Venice, the barrier between the nobility and the people is never passed.

In Holland every city is a republic, but the government of each is in the hands of an aristocracy.

In Switzerland the peasant can never be a senator.

for

for every hope which can be proposed to render men industrious, makes them happy, not only in the end they pursue, but in the pursuit itself. Industry may not attain its object; but in this country, at least, it will never fail of obtaining bread and maintenance, and rarely miss of competence and comfort.

If however it *should* fail, the law has provided a remedy for the failure. The Poor Laws are the act of the community, and if alms are the charity of individuals, the Poor Laws comprehend the charity of the nation. If it should be thought, that there is no charity in giving what the law compels us to give, I answer, that we make our own laws in this country, and that if a tax for the poor were now to be laid on for the first time, the representative body would not, nay, could not raise it without the consent of the people.

Let us view the Poor Laws in another light, and we shall find that they are a remedy against despair*; and perhaps it will be acknowledged, that in this respect they evince the wisdom, as well as the benevolence of the nation. The poor in any country are seldom dangerous unless they are desperate; but if *industry* has failed, there can be no despair while there is a certainty of support. And if *profligacy* has induced distress, it is better that even the profligate should find a refuge, than have a plea for resorting to fraud, violence, or rapine.

Heavy as this burthen is upon the people, it is still the lowest and the last resource of the unhappy; low, however, as it is, those who complain of it most, are not those who have had recourse to it from unavoidable distress, but those who from sloth, idleness, and profligacy, have no other refuge left; and if it were possible to exclude the latter, the former might be maintained in comfort, and the nation be delivered of half its burthen at the same time.

Having thus considered these taxes as the charity of the nation, we come naturally to consider the charity of individuals, and on this head the poor have less right to complain in this country than in any other throughout the world.

For here what we ought to admire most, is not the liberal hand that gives, but the liberal spirit which dictates, and the deliberate wisdom which directs. The prodigal may give

* "The enormities also which extreme wretchedness induces the lowest order of society to commit, are in a manner remedied in England by the immense relief of its poor-rates." Review of Mr. Necker's Administration, page 250.

from thoughtlessness, the ostentatious from vanity, the miser from very hatred of his heir; we may give all our goods to the poor, and yet if we have not charity of heart, it is nothing worth.

But I maintain that the liberal spirit of this nation at the present hour is all directed to its proper end; it is in every instance *designed** to relieve unavoidable distress, or promote industry; and whatever promotes industry, augments the sum of happiness in the world.

From blindness, decrepitude, idiotism, or lunacy, it is true, no advantage can be derived to the public. When, therefore, we contribute to support the poor under these calamities, we mean only to alleviate the miseries of life, without proposing any benefit to our country; but in every other instance when we relieve the poor, our only object is to encourage industry, and place them in a situation to exert it. We neither pretend to feed or clothe them, or give them houses; for these, we tell them, it is their duty to labour; that it is a duty enjoined them by God, by the law of Society, by their rank as Men and Citizens: if any will not work, neither should he eat (*this is a maxim not only of Religion but of Nature, Morality, and Society*); but in every casualty of life, which either the narrowness of means or the improvidence of the careless has neglected to provide against, the generosity of the rich has almost taken the whole burthen upon itself.

The superior orders of this Country might walk through the Streets of this Metropolis, and challenge the poor with having nothing to complain of, except a life of labour; "and that," they might say, "is not allotted you by the ordinance of Man, but by the will of God."

But to the sick, to the lame, to the impotent, they might say, "There is a house to receive you, to feed you, cure you, and restore you to your family and friends. Are your diseases the effects of vice, still you are not abandoned: there is relief held out to you. Go, be cured, and sin no more."

"And you, wretched prostitutes, who have been betrayed yourselves, and now support a wretched existence by betraying others, if you can yet repent, there is a home open to receive you; there is forgiveness held out to you

* *Designed* I say, and I hope executed; for in every charity where attention is paid to economy, each subscriber can do more good by his subscription, than by expending the same sum on the same objects himself.

" in this life, which you thought was lost ; there are means
 " of restoring you to the world, if you will accept them.

" Where is the malefactor just delivered from imprison-
 " ment and bonds, who is now reduced by despair to return
 " to fraud, robbery, or rapine ? If he will labour, there is
 " labour for him ; if he will not, misery and destruction are
 " only the just measure of his iniquity. Where is the youth
 " brought up in profligacy, perverted by ill example, or
 " abandoned to a life of fordid sloth, who is not now received,
 " clothed, protected, and provided with the means of life
 " and occupation ? Is there any calamity, any species of
 " distress, which is not anticipated by the liberality of the
 " benevolent ?"

Such is the language which the Rich in this Country
 might hold to the Poor.

And the Poor themselves may learn, that if the ties which
 bind all orders together in this country were once dissolved,
 whatever calamities the wealthy might be involved in, would
 fall with double weight upon themselves, when there would
 be no resource to look to—no friend, no protector, no bene-
 factor,

THE END.

" in this life, which you thought was lost, there are means
 " of restoring you to the world, in you will accept them."
 " Where is the maulster just delivered from imprisonment
 " ment and bonds, who is now rescued by despair to return
 " to fraud, robbery, or rapine? If he will labour, there is
 " labour for him; if he will not, misery and destruction are
 " only the just measure of his iniquity. Where is the youth
 " brought up in profligacy, perverted by ill example, or
 " abandoned to a life of fordid sloth, who is not now received,
 " clothed, protected, and provided with the means of his
 " and occupation? Is there any calamity, any species of
 " distress, which is not anticipated by the liberality of the
 " benevolent?"
 " Such is the language which the Irish in this County
 " might hold to the Poor.
 " And the Poor themselves may learn that it is this which
 " bind all orders together in this country were once dissolved,
 " whatever calamities the wealthy might be involved in, would
 " fall with double weight upon themselves, when there would
 " be no resource to look to—no friends, no protection, no bene-
 " factor.

THE END.

